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## POLITICS AND THE FARMER.

BY THE HON. BEN. F. CLAYTON, PRESIDENT OF THE FARMERS'  
NATIONAL CONGRESS.

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WE are confronted with the fact that every business interest of the country is under some kind of combination, and should be met by like combination on the part of the great producing classes; not with selfish and unreasonable demands, but by placing the Congress of the United States and the legislatures of the various States in possession of the necessary information required to protect and to build up the productive industries of the country.

As shown by the Census report of 1890, the farm values of the United States are as follows :

Farms and improvements.....	\$13,279,252,649
Farm product, 1890.....	494,247,467
Live-stock .....	2,208,767,473
Farm implements and machinery.....	2,460,107,454
Grand total.....	\$18,442,375,043

This gives agriculture in the United States about thirty per cent. of the entire wealth of the nation ; and if we include the land interest, with all legitimately belonging to it, it amounts to fully sixty-six per cent. In discussing this question, the Secretary of Agriculture in his annual report truly says that the agricultural interest “represents thirty million people, or nearly one-half of our present population.” He further says :

“It may be broadly stated that upon the productiveness of our agriculture, and upon the prosperity of our farmers, the entire wealth and prosperity of the whole nation depend.”

And again :

“The trade and commerce of this vast country, of which we so proudly boast, the transportation facilities so wonderfully developed during the past quarter of a century, are all possible only because the underlying in-

dustry of them all, agriculture, has called them into being. Even the products of our mines are valuable only because of the commerce and the wealth created by our agriculture. These are strong assertions, but they are assertions fully justified by the facts and recognized the world over by the highest authorities in political economy."

The farm is the true source of wealth to the people of the United States. The product of the soil, the raw material gathered from the field, the forest, and the mines, constitute the foundation upon which rest every occupation. From the farm, the people engaged in mechanical pursuits, in the arts, or in the varied professions must be fed, clothed, and warmed. The vast and various resources of the farm have called into being every art that adorns every useful invention and every science that enlarges the boundary of our field of knowledge. The transportation of the tremendous quantity of farm product has called into existence the railway system, into activity the ocean steamers that sail upon every sea and to every known market. For manufacturing its material there have been erected establishments whose smoke darkens every sky. Its product furnishes employment to labor, and life and activity to our great commercial centres. American agriculture, standing in the breach between great contending forces, the friend of law, of order, and of all occupations, becomes the impartial arbiter between the discordant elements of society, and is the first to feel the shock of financial disaster and commercial depression.

The great political revolution of 1892, with its threatened change of governmental policy relating to the industrial interests of the country is, it is alleged, the cause of the late business prostration. In verification of this we quote from most eminent authority.

President Harrison, in his message to Congress in 1892, says :

"That the general conditions affecting the commercial and industrial interests of the United States are in the highest degree favorable; that there has never been a time in our history when work was so abundant or when wages were so high."

President Cleveland, eight months later, in the face of crop prospects the magnitude of which had seldom been seen, in his proclamation convening the extra session of Congress, said :

"That distrust and apprehension concerning the financial situation which pervades all business circles have already caused great loss and damage to our people, and threaten to cripple our merchants, stop the

wheels of manufacture, bring distress and privation to our farmers, and withhold from our workingmen the wage of labor."

In his message to the extra session of Congress, he said :

"With plenteous crops, with abundant promise of remunerative production and manufacture, with unusual invitation to safe investment, and with satisfactory assurance to business enterprise, suddenly financial fear and distrust have sprung up on every side, values supposed to be fixed are fast becoming conjectural, and loss and failure have involved every branch of business."

These two pictures, drawn by master artists—the leaders of the two great political parties—were a true representation of the condition of the business of the country at that time. That of General Harrison was at the close of more than thirty years of practical operation of a policy under which the wealth of the nation had increased from \$16,159,616,068 in 1860 to \$62,610,000,000 in 1890, notwithstanding the loss of some \$10,000,000,000 during the war. The condition of the country, as portrayed by Mr. Cleveland, is equally true, and could have been brought about only by the threatened change of a long-established policy. As soon as it was demonstrated that the new administration was in a position to make good the promises of its so-called reform on certain lines, without waiting for the actual repeal of existing laws, capital became uneasy, deposits were withdrawn from banks, money went into hiding-places in lieu of investment, merchants purchased with caution; factories scaled in time and wages or put out their fires; railways brought to bear the most rigid retrenchment in labor and in expenditure; mines were closed, business-houses suspended, banks ruined, laboring men thrown out of employment, strikes ordered, and the home market for farm products was destroyed. Nor has the substance of the foreshadowed "reform" revived the prostrated industries, as its friends anticipated it would.

A review of the present Congress and the occupation of its members will relieve farmers of responsibility for disastrous legislation. The biography of the Fifty-third Congress, furnished by its members, discloses the fact that out of a membership of four hundred and forty-four the farmers have thirty-five in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate; that the Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture of the Senate comes from an obscure State as to agricultural resources and records himself as an attorney, the only farmer on the committee being from

a homestead in North Dakota. Ten of the eighteen comprising the House Committee, including the Chairman, follow the law as a profession. The great States of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Missouri have each one farmer; and the heart of the great agricultural region—Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa—have no farmer in either branch of Congress. The only chairmanship controlled by the agricultural members of the House is that of the Committee on “Ventilation and Acoustics”; otherwise the farmers of the House are practically disfranchised. This is contrary to the eternal fitness of things, and yet it is about the average representation accorded to the productive industries of the country throughout the history of the American Republic.

Neither of the two great political parties are to blame for this condition of things; the fault lies at the door of the farmer, and is a sad comment on the agricultural voter. His mistake is in not being at the caucus or the primary of the political party to which he belongs; in not recognizing the fact that when the local caucus adjourns, the doors are closed, he is in honor bound to support the candidate and to accept the situation. He has no redress except to bolt the ticket of his party. He should have spent the short time required, once or twice each year, in securing a good farmer, merchant, or professional man to represent him in the higher councils of his party.

It is granted that labor has equal right with capital to organize, but the right of either or any organization to disturb or to destroy the business interest of the country is denied. Past experience with both of these elements, for the last eighteen months, leads us to the conclusion that we have reached the time for Congressional intervention in order to check rash movements, and that they should be enjoined from interfering with traffic until proper investigation is obtained. While the price of farm product is largely governed by supply and demand, yet there is no business so sensitive to spasmodic action of capital or labor. The clogging of the channel of trade is disastrous, nor is railway rate war of practical benefit to the farmer and the shipper of livestock but often a damage in producing unsettled and overflowed markets, which always follow cut rates. Labor strikes not only deprive men of employment and lessen their ability to purchase the necessaries of life, but they retard the regular flow of farm

product to the markets. These being largely perishable, heavy loss is the result, and what is not perishable rapidly accumulates to be thrown on the market in such quantities as to create seriously decreased prices.

Representing a large per cent. of the population of the entire country, any organization to which the farming element would be loyal could approach the Congress of the United States with great confidence of success in securing a respectful hearing. The greatest, and, in fact, the only difficulty in the way, is the problem of maintaining such an organization. Not because of a want of intelligence, for the best brain of the nation has come from the farm ; but because the financial conditions of the farming class are so varied, and the farmers are so evenly distributed throughout the rural districts, that a concentration of power cannot be accomplished so uniformly and harmoniously as with other great interests.

Farmer organizations in the past have been a flat failure. They have been manipulated in the interest of political parties and to advance the interests of political leaders. The Grange organization of the early seventies was a magnificent effort in the right direction. As long as it adhered to the object for which it was organized, it commanded the respect of the leading political parties, but when it entered the muddy pool of politics it soon lost its power for good. The Farmers' Alliance, which took the place of the Grange, was soon wrecked on the same political reef. These failures have caused thoughtful and practical representative men of the great productive interests of the country to look in a different direction for necessary influence to secure legislation in behalf of our great interest. It is through the non-political action of the "Farmers' National Congress of the United States of America" that much has been accomplished, and through which much more may be accomplished.

The principles of this organization are contained in one short sentence of the first section of the Constitution, which says: "Its object shall be to advance the agricultural interest of the Union." The organization is non-political in character, with the same representation as the Congress of the United States, with the addition that the presidents of all State agricultural societies and agricultural colleges are members by virtue of their offices. The delegates, who hold office for two years, are ap-

pointed and commissioned by the Governors of the several States. The object of the organization is two-fold in character. First : It seeks to mould and shape such legislation as the interest of the farmer requires, and to present it to State and national legislative bodies for their action. Second : It has a literary programme by which it seeks to elevate the great masses now engaged in agricultural pursuits to a position in keeping with that occupation.

Annual meetings have been held in St. Louis, Chicago, Indianapolis, Louisville, Nashville, New Orleans, St. Paul, Washington, Topeka, Montgomery, Council Bluffs, Lincoln, Savannah, and at Parkersburg, West Va. At each of these sessions resolutions have been adopted asking for such legislation as the productive interest of the country requires. These resolutions have been sent to the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate, and have been printed and placed upon the desk of every member of Congress.

Nearly every important demand made by this Congress upon our national legislative body has been favorably considered. It demanded the passage of the Interstate Commerce law ; it demanded that the Secretary of Agriculture be made a cabinet officer ; that the Signal Service be enlarged ; that infectious disease of live-stock be stamped out ; that adulteration of human food be prevented ; that our rivers and harbors be improved ; that the irrigation of the arid districts be encouraged ; and that agricultural products be given the benefit of the same protective policy extended by the government to other great interests.

The fact of the Farmers' National Congress being non-political in its character does not preclude the discussion of political questions. Directly or indirectly all questions demanding legislation affect the productive industries, and they are to be discussed freely, fairly, and impartially. The Governors of the several States have been prompt in their appointment of representative men from every branch of that industry as delegates ; and the literary programmes, prepared three months in advance of each meeting, have been carried out by splendid speakers and writers, many of whom have a national reputation. The organization has been a gradual growth until it has become permanent, and its influence with the Government at Washington is second to that of no other.

BEN. F. CLAYTON.